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IDLC MONTHLY

BUSINESS REVIEW



**AQUACULTURE IN BANGLADESH:
ENSURING AFFORDABLE
PROTEIN FOR THE GROWING POPULATION**

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Ensuring Affordable Protein for
the Growing Population**

With abundant natural water resources, Bangladesh has long depended on its thriving aquatic ecosystems for both livelihood and sustenance. There is a saying in Bengali—‘Maache Bhaate Bangali’, which basically indicates rice and fish being our staple food. In recent years, aquaculture, or fish farming, has become increasingly important. Aquaculture has the unquestionable potential to change the economic landscape of our country. According to an Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, Bangladesh's aquaculture industry ranks fifth in the world and is growing consistently through innovative methods, government assistance, and rising demand for protein sources worldwide.

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Aquaculture in Bangladesh: Ensuring Affordable Protein for the Growing Population

Bangladesh has historically depended on its aquatic ecosystems for life and subsistence due to its abundance of natural water resources. The nation's aquaculture sector, which ranks fifth in the world, has the potential to transform the economic landscape of the nation. Between 2023 and 2028, the Bangladeshi aquaculture industry is anticipated to grow at a compound annual growth rate of around 8.96%. This particular industry generated USD 17.38 billion in revenue in 2023, and it presently exports aquatic products valued at over USD 500 million annually.

Environmental sustainability, lack of availability of financing, infrastructural challenges, market access restrictions,

ineffective supply chains, climate change, natural catastrophes, and unjust pricing are some of the issues the industry deals with. These problems restrict the sector's long-term viability and impede its expansion. By promoting exports, improving sustainability, and strengthening market monitoring, Bangladesh can continue expanding its aquaculture sector. Surely, the country's aquaculture industry has the potential to become a worldwide leader with careful investment and attention to sustainable practices.

Akhlaqur Rahman Sachee

Editor

IDLC Monthly Business Review

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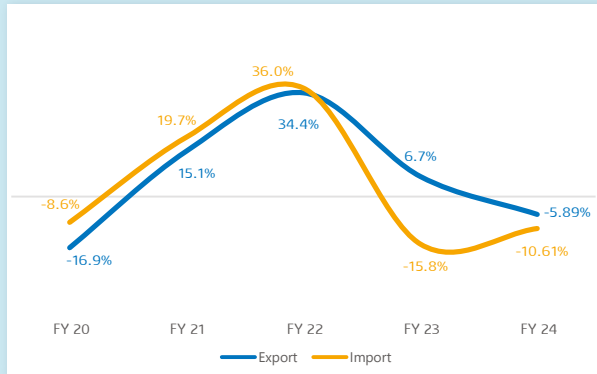
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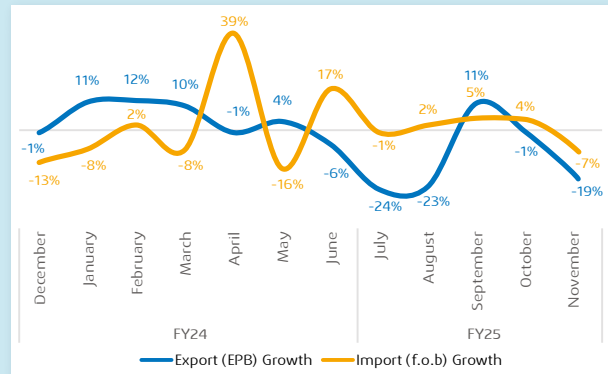
ECONOMY AT A GLANCE

EXPORT-IMPORT

Growth in Export-Import Trade (Last 5 Years)

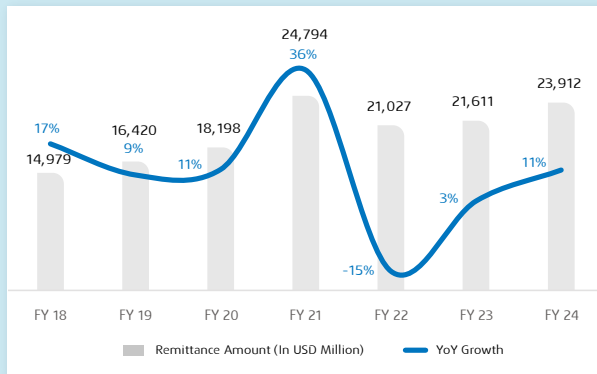


Export and Import Growth (Last 12 Months)

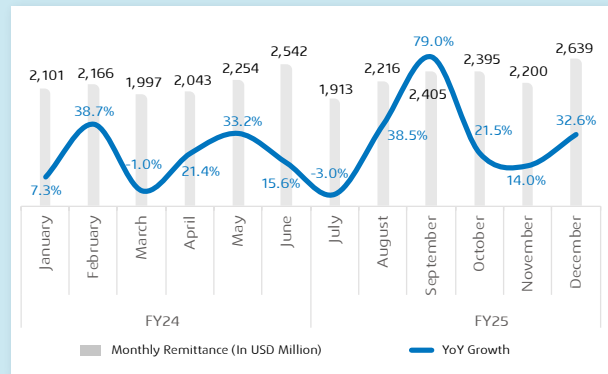


REMITTANCE

Remittance Amount (In USD Million and YoY Growth)

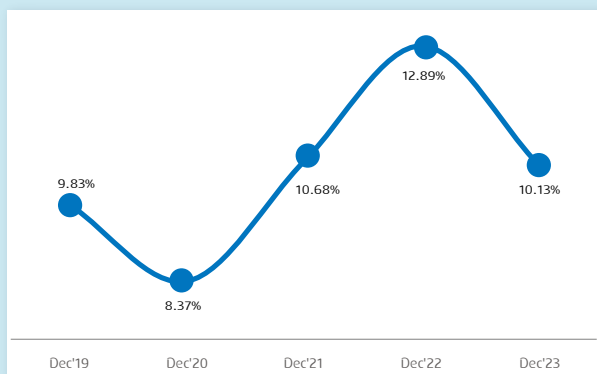


Monthly Remittances (In USD Million and YoY Growth)

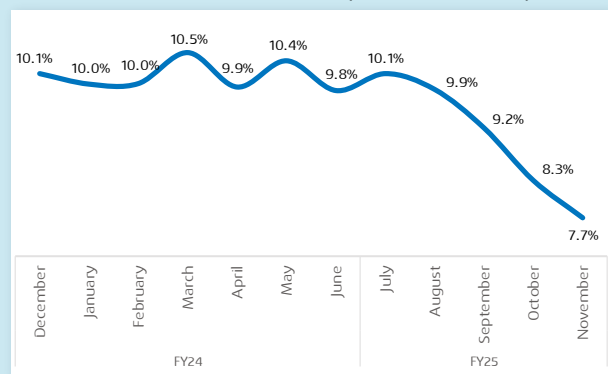


PRIVATE SECTOR CREDIT GROWTH

Private Sector Credit Growth (Last 5 Years)



Private Sector Credit Growth (Last 12 Months)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

■ MONTH IN BRIEF

● In 2024, Bangladesh's exports reached **USD 50 billion**, representing an **8.3% year-over-year increase**, according to data released on January 2, 2025, by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

● Beginning on January 1, 2025, Bangladesh Bank (BB) has raised the crawling peg's mid-rate to **BDT 119 (from BDT 117) for banks' spot purchases of the greenback**.

● GDP grew at its weakest rate in almost four years during the July–September period, 2024, according to preliminary estimates from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), at a mere 1.81%.

● From January 1, the interim government increased the interest rates on savings certificates. Investors who have up to **BDT 7.5 lakh in a five-year Bangladesh Savings Certificate** would receive **12.40%**, and the rate will be **12.37% for investments exceeding the amount**.

● Core apparel, advanced technical textiles, renewable energy, leather, automotive and parts, pharma, plastic, light engineering, footwear, electronics, semiconductors, agro-processing, toys, medical devices, EV batteries, information technology specialists (IT-ES), logistics, and application programming interfaces (APIs) are among the 19 sectors that BIDA has prioritised in its FDI heatmap in order to increase foreign direct investment.

● In the first five months of the current fiscal year, farm credit disbursements decreased by **about 14%, primarily as a result of rising interest rates and political unpredictability**.

● By the end of FY24, Bangladesh's current-account deficit under the balance of payments had decreased to **BDT 698.81 billion**, which was a substantial improvement over the BDT 1.085 trillion deficit recorded in the previous fiscal year.

● The investment cap for individual investors, provident funds, and deposit insurance in the Shariah-based Islamic bond known as Sukuk has been raised by the Bangladesh Bank to 20%.

● According to a Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) report released in the first half of 2024, Bangladesh is still leading the way in South Asia's adoption of mobile money, which has a big impact on financial inclusion and economic growth.

● According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' (BBS) recent Economic Census 2024, **almost 86% of the nation's economic units are having financial difficulties, and 34% are unable to obtain easy loans**.

BANGLADESH'S POSITION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC SUPPLY CHAIN AND ITS YOUNG TALENT POOL MAKE IT A KEY PLAYER FOR GLOBAL SEMICONDUCTOR GROWTH.

Ashik Chowdhury, Executive Chairman, BIDA and Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA), on government's approval of the formation of national taskforce to develop Bangladesh's semiconductor industry. (January 1, 2025. The Daily Star.)

Only brokerage houses, who are subsidiaries of big companies, are running by taking funds from the parents. But individual houses are in real trouble.

Saiful Islam, President, DSE Brokers' Association, on the fact that 95% brokerage houses are now in operating losses due to dull trading activities. (January 8, 2025. The Daily Star.)

The current scenario is unsustainable for local manufacturers. If the government fails to resolve the issues, the industry risks losing its ability to compete, both domestically and internationally.

Md Mohsin Habib Chowdhury, President, Bangladesh Paint Manufacturers' Association (BPMA), on NBR's decision to raise SD on the import of paint and varnish-related raw materials to 30% from 20%. (January 14, 2025. The Daily Star.)

It is not possible to earn \$5 billion by 2030 with small number of companies in the furniture industry. However, we have potential in this sector.

Sk Bashir Uddin, Commerce Adviser, Government of Bangladesh, on Bangladesh's furniture industry's immense potential at a seminar titled 'Bangladesh Furniture Industry: Unlocking Export Potential'. (January 20, 2025. The Business Standard)

As a densely populated country, land acquisition is the biggest challenge in implementing renewable projects.

Imran Karim, Former President, Bangladesh Independent Power Producers' Association (BIPPA), on the scarcity Bangladesh have in implementing renewable energy generation. (January 23, 2025. The Daily Star.)

In countries like those in Africa, entrepreneurs are scarce. But in Bangladesh, despite having many entrepreneurs, they are not receiving adequate support.

Wahiduddin Mahmud, Planning and Education Adviser, Government of Bangladesh, on BBS's census stating that 86% economic units are facing capital challenges and 34% have faced denied loans. (January 29, 2025. The Business Standard.)

In a free-market economy, failing institutions should be allowed to close. However, in our country, deposit insurance coverage for customer deposits is very limited.

Mominul Islam, Former Chairman, Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association, on 19 NBFI's reported NPLs (non-performing loans) exceeding 50%, according to Bangladesh Bank data. (January 7, 2025. The Business Standard.)

The imposition of high tariffs on China and Mexico will create an opportunity for Bangladesh. A lot of apparel work orders are expected to be shifted from China and Mexico to Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

AK Azad, Chairman and Managing Director, Ha-Meem Group, on the possible benefits Bangladesh can get from US-President Donald Trump's trade policies towards China and Mexico. (January 19, 2025. The Daily Star.)

The economy is under severe stress. I have been doing business for 34 years, and this is the most difficult year I have faced in my life in Bangladesh.

Syed Nasim Manzur, Former President, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), at a symposium titled "White Paper and Thereafter: Economic Management, Reforms, and National Budget". (January 19, 2025. The Daily Star)

There is no logic in having thousands of MFIs in the country. This is not sustainable, and some institutions will collapse due to market forces. Those that adopt IT and technology-driven operations will survive in the long run.

Dr. Ahsan H Mansur, Governor, Bangladesh Bank, on the possible challenges microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Bangladesh can face from the competition with agent banks, MFS providers and the emerging digital banks. (January 28, 2025. The Daily Star.)

WORLD ECONOMIC INDICATOR

Country	Nominal GDP: 2023 (In USD Billion)	Real GDP Growth: 2023 (Yearly % Change)	Inflation Point to Point (%)		Current Account Balance: (% of GDP)	Interest Rates (%), Ten Years Treasury Bond	Currency Units (per USD)
Frontier Markets							
Sri Lanka	74.85	-7.82	-4.00	Jan-25	-0.99	12.05	298.35
Vietnam	433.70	5.05	2.94	Dec-24	5.12	3.06	25,080.01
Kenya	108.92	5.51	3.30	Jan-25	-3.94	14.36	129.15
Nigeria	374.95	2.86	34.80	Dec-24	0.32	22.14	1,486.89
Bangladesh	446.35	6.03	10.89	Dec-24	-0.75	10.32	122.00
Emerging Markets							
Brazil	2,173.67	2.91	4.83	Dec-24	-1.32	14.80	5.84
Saudi Arabia	1,067.58	-0.76	1.90	Dec-24	3.94	N/A	3.75
India	3,572.08	7.83	5.22	Dec-24	-1.21	6.69	86.69
Indonesia	1,371.17	5.05	1.57	Dec-24	-0.11	6.97	16,300.00
Malaysia	415.57	3.68	1.70	Dec-24	1.20	3.81	4.46
Philippines	436.62	5.57	2.90	Dec-24	-2.57	6.15	58.42
Turkey	1,108.45	4.52	44.38	Dec-24	-4.07	25.12	35.69
Thailand	514.95	1.87	1.23	Dec-24	1.28	2.31	33.79
China	17,662.04	5.24	0.10	Dec-24	1.50	1.64	7.19
Russia	1,997.03	3.59	9.50	Dec-24	2.53	15.12	98.62
Developed Markets							
France	3,031.78	0.87	1.40	Jan-25	-0.75	3.20	0.97
Germany	4,457.37	-0.31	2.30	Jan-25	6.80	2.46	0.97
Italy	2,255.50	0.92	1.30	Dec-24	0.16	3.55	0.97
Spain	1,581.15	2.50	3.00	Jan-25	2.60	3.11	0.97
Hong Kong	376.97	3.22	1.40	Dec-24	9.40	3.68	7.79
Singapore	501.43	1.08	1.60	Dec-24	19.77	2.91	1.36
United States	27,357.83	2.53	2.90	Dec-24	-2.97	4.54	1.00
Denmark	405.20	1.81	1.90	Dec-24	10.90	2.16	7.20
Netherlands	1,117.10	0.09	4.10	Dec-24	10.17	2.65	0.97
Australia	1,741.88	2.06	2.40	Dec-24	1.22	4.49	1.60
Switzerland	885.14	0.76	0.60	Dec-24	7.64	0.36	0.91
United Kingdom	3,344.74	0.15	2.50	Dec-24	-2.20	4.53	0.81

Bangladesh Data: Interest Rate of 10 Years Treasury Bond As Per February 2025, Inflation As Per December 2024, and Currency Unit (Per USD) As Per 29th January 2025 are sourced from Bangladesh Bank.

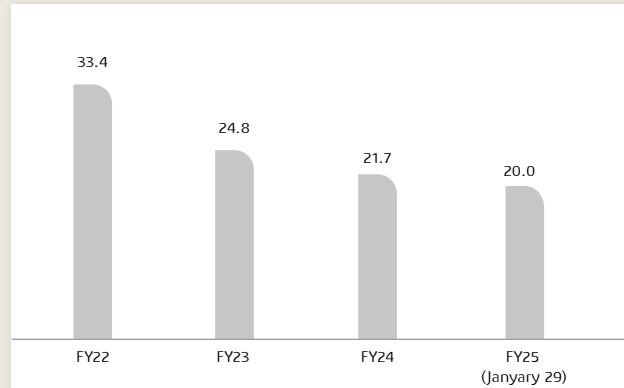
Nominal GDP, Real GDP Growth, and Current Account Balance: Data of all countries are sourced from the IMF World Economic Outlook April 2024.

Inflation: Data of all countries apart from Bangladesh are sourced from tradingeconomics.com.

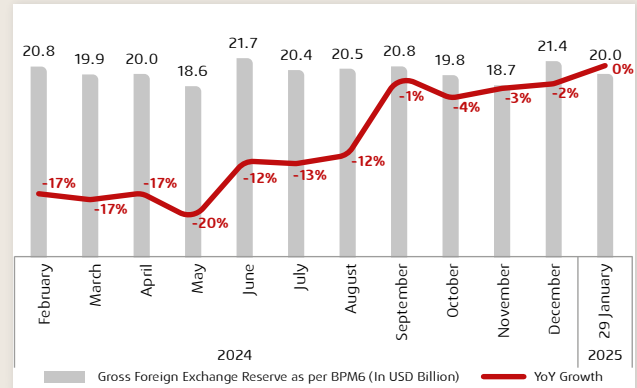
Interest Rate of 10 Years Treasury Bond and Currency Unit: Data of all countries apart from Bangladesh are sourced from investing.com.

BANKING DATA CORNER

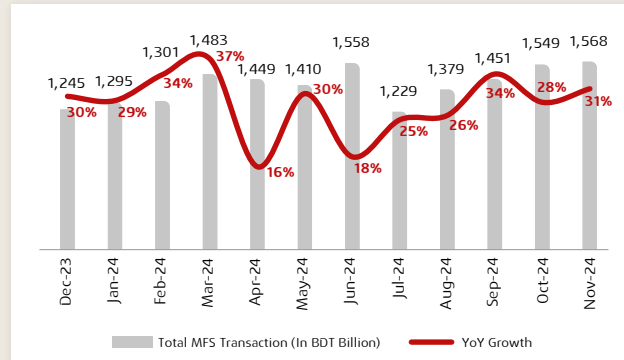
Gross Foreign Exchange Reserve as per BPM6
(In USD Billion and Last 2 Years)



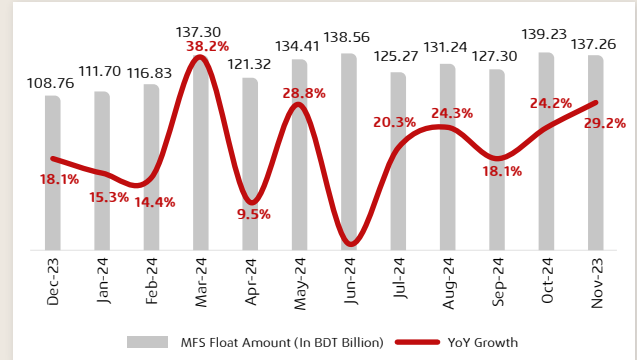
Gross Foreign Exchange Reserve as per BPM6
(In USD Billion and Last 12 Months Trend)



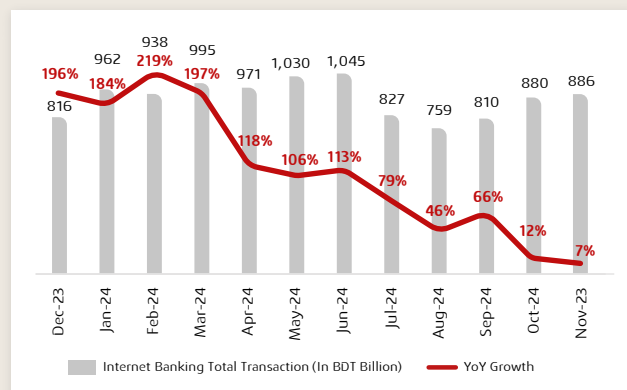
MFS Total Transaction Value
(In BDT Billion and YoY Growth)



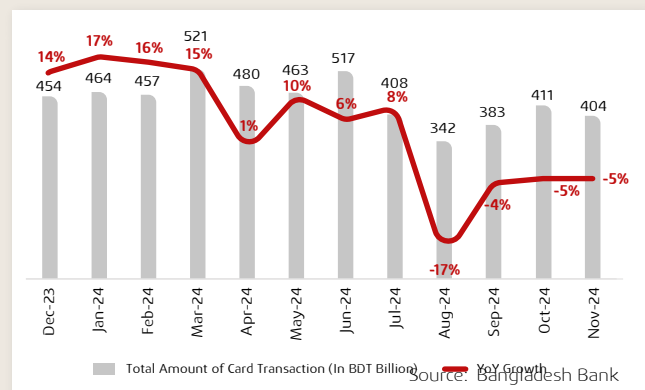
MFS Float Amount
(In BDT Billion and YoY Growth)



Total Amount of Internet Banking Transaction
(In BDT Billion and YoY Growth)



Total Amount of Card Transaction
(In BDT Billion and YoY Growth)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

DocTime



Anowar Hossain

Founder and CEO, DocTime

Interviewed By

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana, Team MBR

Launched in 2020, DocTime is currently one of the leading health-techs in Bangladesh. DocTime provides online prescriptions, medicine delivery, pathology/diagnostic tests, and on-demand general practitioner and speciality consultations with verified and qualified physicians, all while creating valuable electronic health records. With the aim to improve the health of all, they methodically concentrate on increasing everyone's access to reasonably priced healthcare services. Team MBR was in a conversation with the founder and CEO of DocTime, Mr. Hossain, and had the opportunity to find out more about his motivations behind forming the startup and his future visions surrounding DocTime.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: With the aim to digitise the healthcare landscape in Bangladesh, DocTime has emerged as one of the top healthtechs rapidly through its offerings. Would you kindly share with us the inspiration behind founding DocTime?

Anowar Hossain: The inspiration behind DocTime comes from a deeply personal experience. As a child, I suffered an injury that left my arm deformed due to a lack of access to a doctor in rural Bangladesh. This hardship made me realize the critical need for accessible healthcare, especially in underserved areas.

After building my career in various technology companies and startups in the UK, I felt a strong calling to return to my home country and create a solution that would make quality

healthcare accessible to millions. My goal with DocTime is to transform lives by ensuring that no one has to endure preventable suffering due to a lack of medical access. Through innovation and technology, we are working to bridge the healthcare gap and make a meaningful difference.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Currently, many online platforms are offering multiple healthcare services, like- online consultation, medicine delivery, pathological tests etc. to the masses in Bangladesh. May we know how DocTime has distinguished itself from all those platforms?

Anowar Hossain: DocTime offers a world-class user experience that rivals any international telehealth platform while being the best in Bangladesh. Our seamless interface allows users

to access GPs and specialists, consult doctors, and receive prescriptions instantly on their phones. Most patients connect with a doctor in less than 10 minutes, 24/7.

We have built an integrated healthcare ecosystem, ensuring users can access all essential services within DocTime. This includes online doctor consultations, medicine delivery, home diagnostic tests, electronic health records, and insurance products. Additionally, our patients receive exclusive discounts at hospitals and diagnostic centers across almost every district. We also focus on preventive care with regular health and wellbeing advice, healthcare videos, a BMI calculator, and many other services to ensure our patients' overall well-being is taken care of.

With 1.4 million app downloads and a 4.7 rating on the Play Store, DocTime leads the digital healthcare space in Bangladesh. Our network includes 1,600 GPs and specialists from the country's most reputed hospitals. To date, we have provided care to 600,000 patients, with 55% from rural areas and 66% being women and children.

By prioritizing accessibility, affordability, and quality, DocTime is transforming healthcare in Bangladesh and setting new benchmarks in digital health innovation.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: DocTime offers different subscription-based packages consisting of different health care plans for its subscribers. Would you please share with us the sphere of wellness services one can avail from those care plans?

Anowar Hossain: DocTime offers a range of subscription-based healthcare plans designed to provide comprehensive and affordable care for our users. Our subscribers enjoy unlimited access to GPs, discounted consultations with specialists, reduced prices on medicines, and home diagnostic services. Additionally, they can avail exclusive discounts at hospitals and diagnostic centers across the country.

Our plans also include insurance coverage, ensuring financial protection for patients when they fall ill. With DocTime's telehealth services,

users have access to doctors from the comfort of their homes, receive preventive healthcare guidance, and benefit from reduced hospital admission costs—all while being covered by insurance for most medical expenses.

By combining virtual healthcare, discounted medical services, and financial protection, DocTime offers a 360-degree care solution—all for an affordable monthly subscription fee.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Through the app of DocTime, users can turn to any registered GP or specialised doctor anytime from anywhere. May we know how DocTime carries out such requests from the users to ensure the need-based solutions?

Anowar Hossain: DocTime has created a seamless platform that enables users to connect with registered GPs and specialists anytime, from anywhere. Our network features top specialists from Dhaka's leading hospitals, ensuring patients receive expert care without leaving their homes.

Any qualified specialist can join the DocTime network and practice at their convenience, enhancing accessibility for patients. To uphold the highest standards of care, our clinical governance team rigorously verifies doctors' credentials, provides necessary training, and conducts ongoing quality assurance checks. This guarantees that every patient on DocTime receives safe, reliable, and high-quality healthcare.

With a vast network of 1,600 doctors available on the platform, DocTime ensures on-demand access to medical professionals whenever users need them.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: With a whopping out-of-pocket health expenditure in Bangladesh—almost 73% of current health expenditure—it must be difficult for you to generate positive earnings by serving healthcare at such lower costs. Would you kindly share the revenue-generating streams of DocTime with us?

Anowar Hossain: While ensuring that healthcare remains affordable for our users, DocTime has structured its services to keep consultation costs

approximately 30% lower than traditional face-to-face consultations. This is made possible by our doctors, who generously offer their services during their spare time, allowing them to generate additional income while contributing to the overall reduction of healthcare costs.

DocTime generates revenue through multiple streams, including doctor consultation fees, online medicine orders, and home diagnostic tests. Additionally, we have developed various other revenue strategies to maximize our resources.

- **DocTime Ads:** Our platform allows healthcare partners to advertise relevant products and services.
- **White-Label Solutions:** We offer hospitals a customizable telehealth platform, enabling them to integrate our technology into their systems.
- **Prescription Software:** DocTime provides a digital prescription solution that doctors can use in their physical clinics.
- **Medical Tourism:** Our newly launched medical tourism service assists patients in seeking treatment abroad. We handle everything from online consultations with international doctors for second opinions to arranging medical visas, scheduling doctor appointments, and managing other logistics, ensuring a hassle-free experience for patients.

DocTime continuously explores new opportunities to maximize the value of our patient and doctor network, creating a platform that benefits not only our users but also our healthcare providers and investors.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Strategic partnerships with different corporate bodies can certainly aid you in grabbing a bigger market share. Would you please enlighten us regarding such an offer (if any) and the benefits a beneficiary can get through such an agreement from DocTime?

Anowar Hossain: DocTime has established strategic partnerships with various corporate

organizations to enhance healthcare accessibility and provide the best care for our users.

One of our key partnerships is with Banglalink, where all Banglalink users can access DocTime's services directly from the MyBL app through a seamless white-label integration. Our advanced technology ensures that users can stay within the MyBL platform while benefiting from all of DocTime's healthcare services.

Additionally, Amber IT, one of our premium partners, offers free healthcare services to its customers, powered by DocTime. We have also collaborated with ICDDR,B to provide specialized care and treatment plans for hypertension patients.

For corporate clients, DocTime offers B2B subscription plans, allowing organizations to provide healthcare benefits to their employees for an affordable fee. These packages combine telehealth services and insurance coverage, ensuring comprehensive care for employees. Some of our notable corporate partners include bKash, Intertec, Banglatrac, and Asrotex. Through these partnerships, DocTime continues to expand its reach, making quality healthcare more accessible and affordable for businesses and individuals alike.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Virtual consultation with a doctor cannot always meet the measures required to detect a disease or health condition. Would you please share with us the challenges DocTime faces in their activities and how those challenges are dealt with?

Anowar Hossain: While virtual consultations provide a convenient and accessible way for patients to connect with doctors, they do come with certain limitations, especially in cases where physical examinations, diagnostic tests, or immediate medical interventions are required.

One of the key challenges DocTime faces is the inability to perform physical examinations during virtual consultations. To address this, we have integrated home diagnostic services, allowing patients to book lab tests and sample collections from the comfort of their homes. Additionally, we

collaborate with diagnostic centers and hospitals where patients can visit for further tests if needed.

Another challenge is ensuring accurate diagnosis and treatment when a doctor cannot physically examine a patient. To mitigate this, we have built a structured consultation flow within the platform, guiding both patients and doctors through a detailed medical history collection process. This ensures that doctors have enough information to make informed decisions.

Additionally, technology literacy and internet access can be barriers for some users, particularly in rural areas. To overcome this, DocTime has developed an easy-to-use, intuitive platform and provides customer support to assist patients in navigating the system.

For cases requiring in-person care, our platform helps seamlessly refer patients to specialists, hospitals, or diagnostic centers, ensuring they receive the necessary follow-up care.

While telehealth cannot replace the hands-on experience of physical care, it enhances and complements traditional healthcare by offering convenience, efficiency, and timely access to medical professionals. It acts as a bridge between patients and healthcare providers, enabling continuous care and follow-ups that are often challenging in physically distant or underserved areas.

Despite these challenges, DocTime continues to innovate and expand its services to bridge the gap between virtual and physical healthcare, making quality medical assistance more accessible for all.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: So far, DocTime has not taken any major fundraising initiatives. May we know if DocTime has any plans for fundraising soon and how DocTime is planning to expand in the future?

Anowar Hossain: DocTime has successfully raised capital in the past and continues to work diligently on securing funding for future growth. While raising funds for startups in Bangladesh can be particularly challenging, we have been fortunate to have strong support from our lead investors, who have been with us from the very beginning. Their belief in our vision and business model has been invaluable in driving our progress.

As we look ahead, we are focused on expanding our services, both geographically and in terms of the range of healthcare solutions we offer. Our goal is to continue scaling within Bangladesh, where we see significant potential for growth, especially in underserved rural areas. We also have plans to expand into new international markets, including neighboring countries in South Asia, where the demand for accessible healthcare solutions is growing rapidly.

To fuel this expansion, we are actively engaging with potential investors, family offices, and venture capitalists who share our commitment to improving healthcare accessibility. With the support of our investors and strategic partners, we aim to continue innovating and building on our success, offering patients a seamless, comprehensive healthcare experience that bridges the gap between virtual and in-person care.





AQUACULTURE IN BANGLADESH: ENSURING AFFORDABLE PROTEIN FOR THE GROWING POPULATION

Written By
Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana

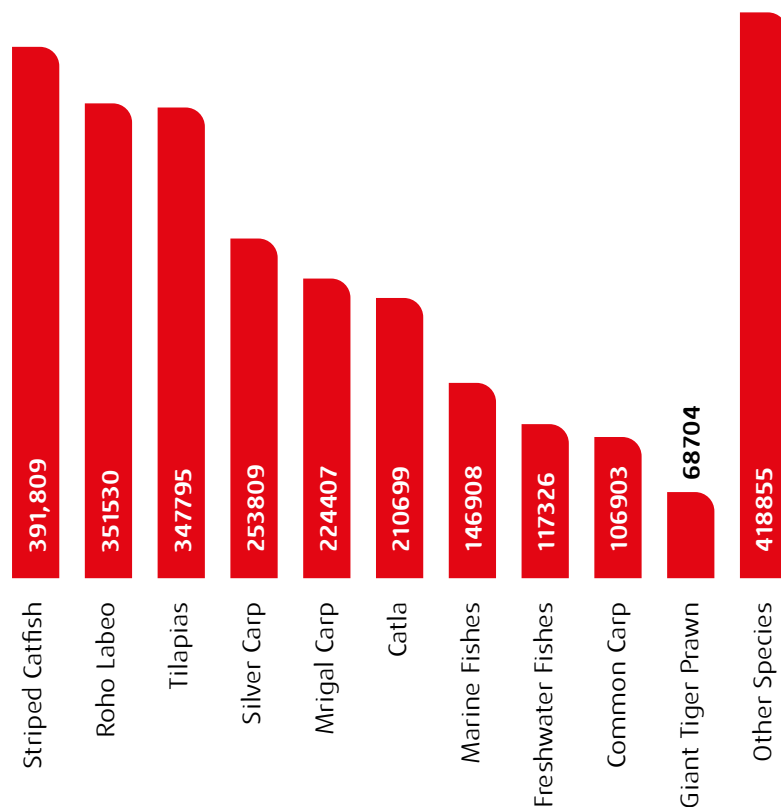
With abundant natural water resources, Bangladesh has long depended on its thriving aquatic ecosystems for both livelihood and sustenance. There is a saying in Bengali—‘Maache Bhaate Bangali’, which basically indicates rice and fish being our staple food. In recent years, aquaculture, or fish farming, has become increasingly important. Aquaculture has the unquestionable potential to change the economic landscape of our country, where over 165 million people depend on agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods to some extent. According to an Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, Bangladesh’s aquaculture industry ranks fifth in the world and is growing consistently through innovative

methods, government assistance, and rising demand for protein sources worldwide.

Portrayal of Bangladesh’s Aquaculture Sector

Fish farming has been practiced for generations in Bangladesh, mostly in freshwater environments including ponds, rivers etc. Fish farming was mostly local and small-scale in the beginning. However, the potential of aquaculture as a business has emerged in recent years due to mounting population pressures and rising food demand. In Bangladesh, the most common aquaculture products are shrimp, tilapia, pangasius, and carp. Bangladesh produces the most Roho Labeo (also known as ‘Rui’) and striped catfish (also known as ‘Pangash’) of all the aquaculture products.

Figure 1: Top 10 Species in Bangladesh’s Aquaculture Production by Quantity (2021)



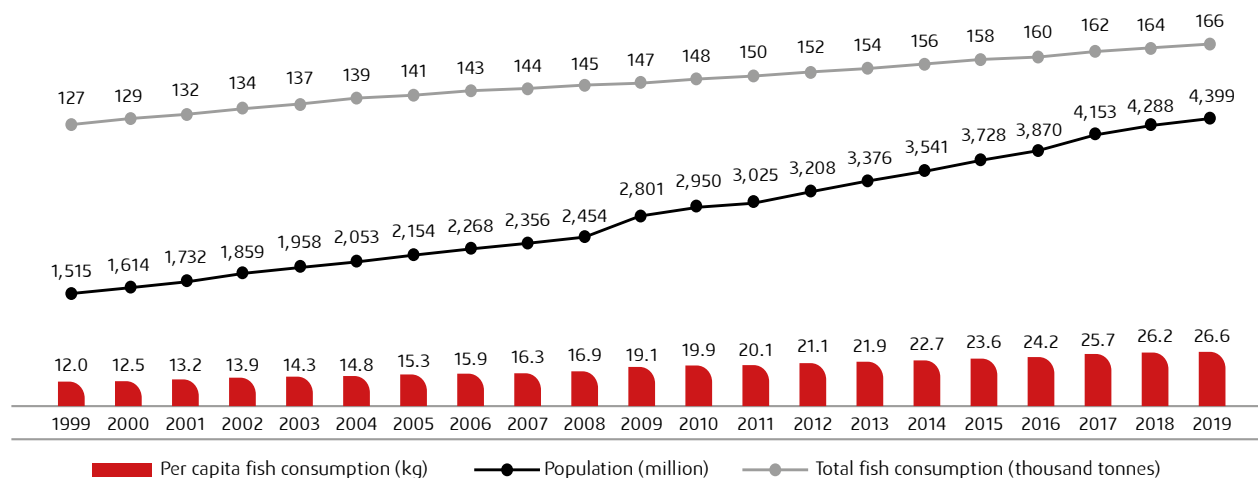
Source: Food and Agriculture Organization



Freshwater aquaculture and coastal aquaculture are the two basic categories into which Bangladeshi aquaculture can be divided. Districts that contribute significantly to aquaculture production include Mymensingh, Jessore, Comilla, Barisal, Bhola,

Pirojpur, Chandpur, Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Netrokona, and Sunamganj. Bangladesh's overall consumption of fish and seafood has grown significantly over the past few years, indicating new opportunities for our aquaculture industry.

Figure 2: Fish and Seafood Consumption in Bangladesh



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

Along with the rising fish and seafood consumption, the total supply of aquaculture production in Bangladesh too has been moving up the ladder. The

FAO has revealed statistics related to this regarding the share of aquaculture production in Bangladesh with regard to the worldwide production.

Table 1: Worldwide Share of Aquaculture Production of Bangladesh

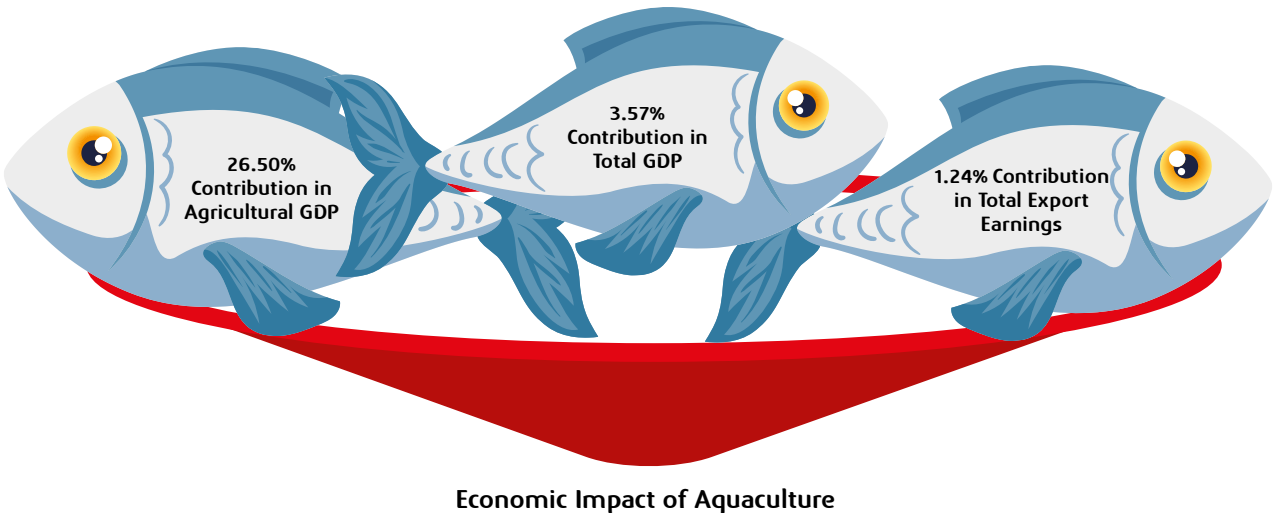
Bangladesh	Share of world total (%)
Total country area (excluding coastal waters, 2020)	0.11
Surface area of inland waterbodies (2020)	0.33
Coastline length (2019)	0.07
Total renewable water resources (2020)	2.24
Population (2021)	2.14
Aquaculture production (all areas, 2021)	2.09
Aquaculture production (inland waters, 2021)	4.26
Aquaculture production (marine areas, 2021)	0.34

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

Bangladesh's economy has benefited greatly from the aquaculture industry. The aquaculture market in Bangladesh is anticipated to expand at a Cumulative Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of about 8.96% between 2023 and 2028. In 2023, the seafood business brought in USD 17.38 billion

for Bangladesh. Bangladesh currently exports aquatic items worth about USD 500 million a year. Day by day, economic impact of aquaculture sector in Bangladesh is getting bigger. Let’s have a glimpse of the economic impact of aquaculture in Bangladesh.

Figure 3: Economic Contribution of Aquaculture in Bangladesh



Source: BIASS 2024

According to a report by Ministry of Fisheries And Livestock, over 12% of Bangladesh’s population, or about 20 million people, work directly or indirectly

in the aquaculture industry. Bangladesh is the second-largest producer of aquaculture among Southern Asian nations as per FAO.

Table 2: Ranking of Southern Asian Countries by Aquaculture Production in 2021

Country	Aquaculture Production		GDP Contribution per Capita	
	Tonnes	Share of World Total (%)	Current USD	Ratio to World Average (%)
1. India	9,408,300	7.4648	2,238	18.12
2. Bangladesh	2,638,745	2.0937	2,458	19.90
3. Iran	478,737	0.3798	3,290	26.64
4. Pakistan	164,527	0.1305	1,505	12.18
5. Nepal	100,854	0.0800	1,208	9.78
6. Sri Lanka	50,977	0.0404	4,087	33.09
7. Afghanistan	11,107	0.0088	n/a	n/a
8. Bhutan	193	0.0002	3,138	25.41

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

Value Chain of the Aquaculture Sector

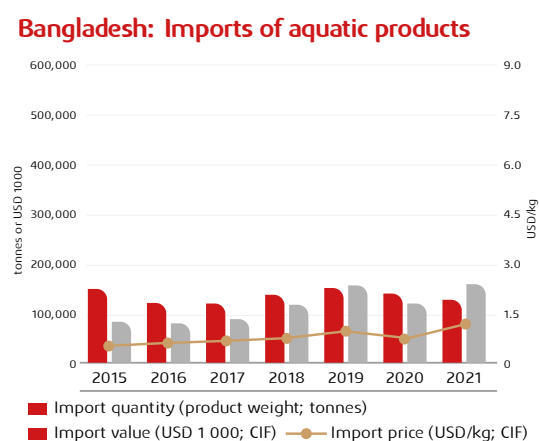
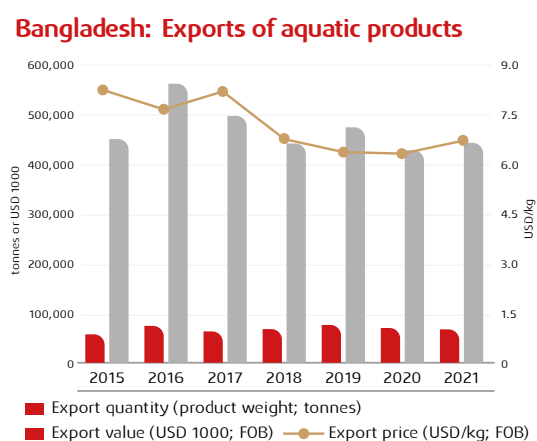
According to a report prepared for the FAO, the most important participants in the aquaculture sector are fish farmers, farias, aratdars, paikers, retailers, and consumers. Here, farias are middlemen who usually purchase small quantities of fish from the farmers, accumulate them, and sell them to aratdars or paikers. It is to be noted that aratdars play the most crucial role in the value chain, as they facilitate the trading of fish between the fish farmers, or farias, and the paikers, or retailers. Paikers, one of the important value chain actors, are also known as wholesalers/beparis. They purchase fish from aratdars and sell them to retailers. Finally, consumers purchase fish from the retailers. In this value chain, aratdars

and paikers often play the role of financiers for the fish farmers. They offer payment in advance to the fish farmers, which are popularly known as dadans. In exchange for dadans, farmers become bound to sell the fish at predetermined prices to the dadan providers, which often results in lower profit margins for the farmers than expected.

Export-Import Potential of Aquaculture

According to data from FAO, although Bangladesh's export quantity of aquatic products was lower than the import quantity, export value and price was significantly higher than the import value and price in the last few years. This signals a great possibility for export potential in our aquaculture industry.

Figure 4: Export and Import of Aquatic Products in Bangladesh



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

Aquaculture and Food Security Potential

Aquaculture plays a pivotal role in ensuring food security in Bangladesh. Our fisheries industry, which ranks among the biggest producers of fish, provides a sizable amount of the domestic need for animal protein. In addition to being a major source of vital nutrients, fish is also a more cost-effective source of protein for the Bangladeshi people than meat and dairy products. The FAO has reported that the proportion of animal protein in Bangladesh's total protein diet rose from 18.2% in 2010 to 20.2% in 2020. From 10.2% in 2010 to 11.9% in 2020, fish and seafood accounted for a larger portion of the protein intake. Between

1999 and 2019, the overall amount of fish and seafood consumed grew from 1,514,955 tonnes to 4,399,195 tonnes

The Bangladeshi government has been able to pursue ambitious food security goals due to the increased supply of high-protein fish and the growing efficiency of aquaculture operations. The availability of fish from both capture fisheries and aquaculture has helped Bangladesh significantly reduce hunger and malnutrition. The surplus of the farmed fish is sold to foreign markets, further boosting Bangladesh's capacity to make money while offering premium, sustainable seafood to consumers worldwide, demonstrating how

aquaculture can contribute to food security across national boundaries.

Financing Potential of Aquaculture

Due to their lower risk appetite, the banks and NBFIs are not so interested in financing the value chain participants in the aquaculture sector. Fish farmers, farias, aratdars, paikers and retailers have been found to be mostly self-financed. In cases where they require additional funds, they seek assistance from friends and relatives. When external financing is required, they seek loans from MFIs such as ASA, SDF, Bureau Bangladesh, Uddipan, Grameen Bank, BRAC, Padakhep, and so on. The aforementioned MFIs have gained much popularity in the aquaculture sector as they do not require collateral and compliance documents. Also, due to the relaxed documentation process and the relaxed assessment of financing proposals, they can disburse loans much faster than banks and NBFIs. Apart from that, marginal farmers often avail dadans from aratdars and paikers. They also borrow from the local money lenders at exorbitant interest rates. Also, banks and NBFIs sometimes finance large-scale aratdars and paikers, ensuring enhanced security measures.

Bangladesh being an agricultural country, the aquaculture sector possesses immense potential. Some of the opportunities that can be capitalised by banks and NBFIs have been stated below.

- The aquaculture sector has experienced steady growth over the years. Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of the sector was 5.3% during the period 2009-2019. Moreover, fish are staple goods. The demand for fish is likely to remain unaffected due to economic shocks or changes in market forces. If borrowers can be carefully selected, a customer base comprising recurring customers can be developed.
- The value chain actors in the aquaculture sector require small-ticket loans in most cases. In the case of small-ticket loans, banks and NBFIs usually have more bargaining power while negotiating interest rates and

processing fees. Also, small-ticket loans leave minor dents in the portfolio in case of default, and aggressive collection efforts can be put in place for the settlement of the default facilities.

- As the value chain actors work very closely with each other, search costs may come down for banks and NBFIs because of word-of-mouth marketing.

Challenges in Aquaculture

Despite the growth of aquaculture in Bangladesh, there are still several challenges that limit the sector's long-term sustainability. These challenges include:

Environmental Sustainability

The effects of aquaculture, especially industrial fish farming, on regional ecosystems have often raised concerns. Fish go through various critical stages throughout the rearing process and are vulnerable to diseases and infections. The sector has significant environmental dangers, including the potential for contamination from fish waste, the abuse of water resources, and the spread of illnesses.

Barriers to Market Access and Infrastructure

Even while the aquaculture industry has thrived, poor infrastructure, especially in rural regions, has hindered its expansion. The supply chain in aquaculture sector is inefficient as a result of inadequate storage facilities, poor transportation networks, and restricted access to processing facilities. Many farmers in the industry often face difficulties in accessing markets, which bars them from getting the benefits from export.

Inefficient Supply Chain

Fish can be categorised as perishable goods. In most cases, fish are not transported live, like poultry and cattle. Fish need to be frozen and packaged carefully before being transported. Unless recommended measures are taken, the quality of the fish goes bad.

Natural Disasters and Climate Change

The aquaculture farms of Bangladesh are at risk from increasing sea levels, floods and increasing cyclones, making it more susceptible to the effects of climate change. These environmental impacts have the potential to disrupt fish production, harm aquaculture infrastructure, and have an impact on supply chains.

Unfair Price

The prices of the fish that the farmers receive are very sensitive to a number of factors, including freshness, breed, price, season, and many others. Farmers sometimes may not even receive the prices that are required to break even. Even the costs of rearing fish vary during the farming process due to fluctuations in the prices of feed, medicines, and other inputs. Farmers often avail *dadans* from *aratdars* and *paikers*, for which they become bound to sell their products for predetermined prices even if the spot prices are higher than the predetermined prices. Additionally, due to multiple middlemen in the value chain, the lion's share of the profits are

reaped by *farias*, *aratdars*, *paikers*, and retailers. Farmers get to enjoy smaller portions of the profits.

Way Forward

In Bangladesh, aquaculture has developed into a vital and dynamic industry that supports food security, economic expansion, and the reduction of poverty. However, aquaculture in Bangladesh needs to overcome major infrastructure, social, and environmental obstacles if it is to continue to thrive. To promote aquaculture, our government should loosen regulations pertaining to the export of aquatic products. In order to guarantee fair price for all stakeholders in aquaculture processes, monitoring efforts also need to be reinforced. Bangladesh can keep growing its aquaculture industry to its full potential by encouraging innovation, advancing sustainability, and fortifying governance. Our aquaculture sector has the potential to become a global leader in the production of seafood in addition to providing for the country's food needs with careful investment and ongoing attention to sustainable methods.





Amirul Mostafa Arefeen
 Founder & CEO, Seaqua Limited

Interviewed By
 Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana, Team MBR

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen, founder & CEO of Seaqua Limited, possesses vast experience in the area of tech-driven businesses, especially the aquaculture sector. Along with Seaqua, he has also played the role of founding partner in Sticker Driver and Sweetsin Coffees. With the goal of transforming the blue food value chain and empowering small-scale participants in fisheries and aquaculture, Seaqua is Bangladesh's first tech-driven startup exploring the blue economy. By connecting fishermen directly with buyers through a community-driven digital auction platform, Mr. Arefeen aspires to change the landscape of aquaculture in Bangladesh. Team MBR was in a conversation with Mr. Arefeen and was fortunate enough to receive his take on the aquaculture sector in Bangladesh.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Bangladesh has seen rapid growth in aquaculture over the past few years, at a notable average growth rate of 7.02% per year from 2001 to 2022. Would you kindly share with us the factors that, in your opinion, have driven this remarkable growth?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: Over the last two decades, Bangladesh's aquaculture industry has witnessed impressive growth, largely driven by key factors that include improved farming techniques, increased investment, and a strong domestic and export demand for fresh fish & seafood. The country's large riverine system and coastal areas provide a natural advantage, enabling high-yield aquaculture activities. Technological advancements in breeding, disease management, and feed development have played a significant role

in boosting productivity. Furthermore, the development organisation's focus on training and skill development for fishermen, as well as investments in aquaculture infrastructure by private companies, has enabled greater efficiency across the sector. The export potential of fish and seafood also contributed to the growth, as demand for global seafood is on the rise. With increasing consumer preference for healthy and protein-rich diets, the market for aquaculture products is expected to keep expanding. The resilient efforts of fishers and the growing adoption of sustainable practices have been key enablers of this growth.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: As global demand for seafood rises, Bangladesh's aquaculture industry has the upward potential to tap into the international markets. May we know about your

assessment of the potential for aquaculture exports from Bangladesh?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: Bangladesh is well-positioned to tap into the international markets for fresh fish & seafood, and this potential is largely driven by sustainability, competitive pricing, and high-quality products. The country's aquaculture industry produces a variety of species, including shrimp, tilapia, and pangasius, which are in high demand globally. According to the FAO, the global demand for seafood is expected to increase by 2.8% annually over the next decade, driven by population growth and an increasing preference for healthy diets. Bangladesh's shrimp export sector is already significant, contributing the highest percentage to the country's total fisheries exports from Black Tiger Shrimp, although it has been declining over the last three years for various reasons. As the industry modernises and traceability systems are implemented, we see even greater potential in entering premium international markets by diversifying aquaculture farming into other shrimp species, such as vannamei, with better cold chain logistics, quality certification, and sustainable farming practices. Bangladesh can position itself as a reliable exporter of high-quality, sustainable seafood to international markets like the US, EU, and Asia.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Despite Bangladesh being a riverine country and having a vast maritime area, imports of aquatic products in Bangladesh rose to an annual growth rate of 19.24% in 2021 from 2000. May we know about your suggestions on minimising dependence on imports of aquatic products?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: The increasing dependence on imported aquatic products, despite Bangladesh's vast water resources, is largely driven by quality gaps, price differences, and supply chain inefficiencies. To minimise imports, there must be a shift towards increased domestic production, improved quality

control, and better cold chain management. Encouraging the local production of higher-value species, which are largely imported, can help reduce dependency. Investment in modern aquaculture practices, such as integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) and recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS), can enhance production efficiency and yield. Moreover, creating incentives for local producers to invest in technology and quality certification can help reduce the gap between domestic and imported products. By improving domestic production capacity and quality control, Bangladesh can significantly reduce reliance on imports.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Fish farmers in Bangladesh mostly have to sell their fish at a predetermined lower rate to the aratdars and paikers. In your opinion, what measures do you think should be taken to ensure fair prices for all the market participants of aquaculture?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: To ensure fair pricing for all market participants, there is a need for market transparency, direct access to buyers, and financial empowerment for fish farmers. At Seaqua, we've identified that immediate liquidity constraints often make fishermen dependent on aratdars and paikers, who dictate prices. To solve this, we are developing a live auction platform that connects fishermen directly to buyers, enabling them to access fair pricing through competitive bidding. This digital platform will also ensure immediate cash liquidity, removing the need for unnecessary middlemen & intermediaries. Additionally, implementing traceability and quality assurance systems will give buyers confidence in the products and create an environment of fair competition. By empowering fishers to access the market directly, they will no longer be forced to sell at low prices, leading to better profit margins and sustainable livelihoods for all participants in the value chain.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: As we all know, aquatic products are highly perishable in

nature. May we know about your assessment of the adequacy of supply chain facilities in the aquaculture sector of Bangladesh, and how do you think technology can be integrated into this process

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: The current supply chain facilities in Bangladesh's aquaculture sector are inadequate, with significant gaps in cold storage, transportation, and traceability. Despite the country's rich resources, high perishability of aquatic products remains a challenge. Cold storage facilities are often lacking, and temperature-controlled transportation is limited, leading to high levels of post-harvest losses. To address these issues, technology can play a vital role. IoT-based cold chain systems, for instance, can provide real-time monitoring of temperature and humidity during transport, ensuring that products are kept at optimal conditions. Blockchain technology can be utilised for traceability, ensuring product quality and providing buyers with confidence about sourcing. At Seaqua, we are integrating smart cold storage hubs and developing IoT-enabled logistics platforms to enhance supply chain efficiency, reduce spoilage, and increase transparency. Technology-driven solutions will allow better management of perishable goods and create a more sustainable, efficient seafood supply chain.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Different financing options in the aquaculture sector are essential to scale operations and modernise aquaculture methods. Would you kindly share with us the kinds of financing options required for growth and sustainability in our aquaculture sector?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: The aquaculture sector needs innovative financing models to support scalability and modernisation. In our experience at Seaqua, revenue-based financing (RBF) is a suitable option, as it allows fish farmers to repay the capital based on a percentage of their future revenue. This model provides flexibility and reduces the burden of

high-interest loans. Additionally, halal financing models, in alignment with Islamic principles, can be a great tool for the local market, offering profit-sharing arrangements and interest-free loans. Furthermore, the development of blue bonds, which are specifically designed for blue economy development, can offer long-term financing for modernising infrastructure such as cold storage, sustainable hatcheries and aquaculture farms, and technology upgrades. Combining these models with government support and private investment will create a robust financial ecosystem that will enable aquaculture businesses to thrive sustainably and at scale.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Getting involved in the aquaculture sector, you must have significant experience on how to navigate in this industry. May we know how much of the entrepreneurial scope has, in your opinion, been explored so far?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: The entrepreneurial scope in the aquaculture sector remains vast and largely untapped. While there has been significant growth, there are still many opportunities to create innovative solutions that can transform the industry. From value-added seafood products to marine aquaculture, IoT-enabled farming, and smart logistics, there is a tremendous potential for new businesses. At Seaqua, we are exploring multiple avenues, such as creating direct-to-consumer brands, expanding marine aquaculture ventures, and developing digital auction platforms for fresh fish & seafood. The need for improved infrastructure, better cold chain logistics, and sustainable farming methods presents exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs. Furthermore, with the growing demand for healthy, sustainable fresh fish & seafood, the scope for new entrants and innovations in the aquaculture sector is immense.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Apart from the 'National Aquaculture Development Strategy and Action Plan' taken for the

period 2013–2020, there aren't any noteworthy policies in Bangladesh for aquaculture. Would you kindly share with us the areas in which policymakers can work to help the industry flourish even more?

Amirul Mostafa Arefeen: Policymakers can play a key role in supporting the aquaculture sector by focusing on long-term strategic planning and policy reforms. There is a need for better financial support mechanisms, such as subsidised loans and insurance products for farmers. Additionally, government-backed incentives for sustainable practices

and technology adoption can help drive modernisation. Policymakers should also focus on improving cold chain infrastructure and supporting public-private partnerships to build better logistics networks. Furthermore, policies that encourage traceability, certification, and international standards for seafood products will help position Bangladesh as a leader in the global fresh fish & seafood market. Finally, continued investment in education and skill development for farmers, as well as research on sustainable farming practices, will be crucial in ensuring the industry's future growth and success.



IMMERSING INTO DELIGHTFUL TREATS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE BANGLADESHI CHOCOLATE MARKET

Written By
Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana



Bangladesh, renowned for its varied culinary specialities, hospitality, and rich cultural legacy, is now starting to establish itself in a quite sweet and surprising field: the chocolate industry. Although this delicious treat has long captivated people worldwide, Bangladesh's chocolate market is a relatively new entrant to the global market. Nonetheless, it is a market that is growing quickly, is ready for innovation, and is drawing a lot of consumer attention. According to a Business Standard article, the candy-chocolate sector in Bangladesh has expanded by more than BDT 2,000 crore over the past 20 years, with an annual growth rate of 12%–15%, thanks to the country's rising chocolate-lovers.

Glimpse into the Chocolate Market in Bangladesh

Previously, Bangladeshi people used to satisfy their sweet cravings with a variety of traditional sweets, such as roshogolla, mishti doi, chomchom, and others. The wealthy parts of society were the primary consumers of chocolate, which was imported and regarded as a luxury good. The majority of chocolates sold in Bangladesh were imported, including popular international brands like Nestle and Cadbury. However, the market dynamics have changed due to the expansion of the urban consumer base, the burgeoning middle class, and rising disposable income. Over the last years, the demand for chocolate has surged, driven by the younger generation's growing preferences for new flavours. This shift has made it possible for both local companies and international brands to increase their footprint.

According to Mordor Intelligence, the candy market in Bangladesh is anticipated to expand at a CAGR (Cumulative Annual Growth Rate) of 8.53% between 2025 and 2030. The Business Standard stated in 2019 that Bangladesh's chocolate and candy market was worth approximately USD 165 million. Nonetheless, a recent analysis by IndustryARC has projected that the size of Bangladesh's candy market will reach USD 399.2 million by 2026, expanding at a CAGR of 7.5% from 2021 to 2026.

Bangladesh's chocolate market is a blend of well-known local and global players. While multinational brands are using their worldwide fame to appeal to Bangladeshi customers who are becoming more brand-conscious, local manufacturers are meeting the growing demand by creating items that are suited to Bangladeshi tastes and preferences.

In our chocolate industry, well-known local brands like Pran, Olympic, and Danish Candy have made a name for themselves. Chocolates, toffees, candies, lollipops, and chewing gums are just a few of the varied items that these firms offer to appeal to the value segments. Because they can make goods at a cheaper price point than international companies, local manufacturers have a clear cost advantage.

Figure 1: Local Chocolate Manufacturers



According to The Business Standard, about 20 factories in Dhaka make chocolates and candies. Despite the fact that fifteen years ago there were more than forty local brands competing in our local market, foreign brands are discouraging and pushing local companies out of the market. In Bangladesh, Olympic Pulse is currently the most well-known candy. According to the company, sales of Pulse exceeded BDT 100 crore in 2018. According to an article by The Business Standard, Pran-RFL has the biggest market share in the chocolate industry out of all the local businesses. Perfetti Van Melle, an Italian company that makes chocolates locally in Bangladesh, is the second most well-

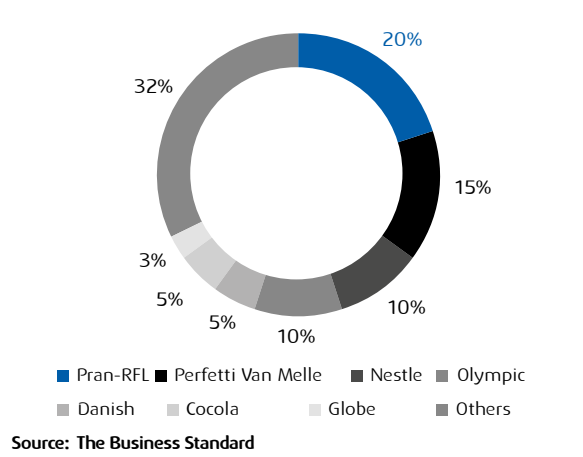
known brand. Alpenliebe, Mentos, Center Fresh, Center Fruit, and Just Jelly candies and chewing gum are some of its popular sub-brands. In terms of popularity, Olympic Industries is ranked third.

Figure 2: Popular Perfetti Van Melle Products



Leading international brands like Nestle, Cadbury, Mars, etc., have also made inroads into the Bangladeshi market in addition to the local ones. In order to meet the growing demand for high-end, imported chocolates, these brands have made large investments in local manufacturing facilities and profited from their brand image. Confectioneries and departmental stores frequently contain brands like Cadbury's Dairy Milk, Nestle's Kit Kat, Mars' Snickers, Ferrero Rocher, and others. According to a The Business Standard report, around 90% of the candy offered at Agora Super Shop is imported, primarily from Malaysia, Thailand, India, and Myanmar. The market shares of all local and international brands were also disclosed in the report.

Figure 3: Market Share Percentage of the Chocolate Brands in Bangladesh (2019)

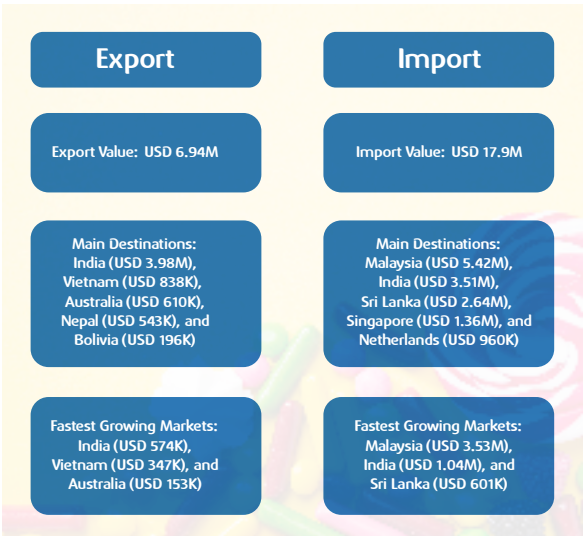


Along with Bangladesh, the chocolate industry has been expanding at an impressive rate on a global scale too. The worldwide chocolate market was estimated to be worth USD 130.72 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow to USD 172.89 billion by 2030, according to a report by MarkNtel Advisors. In addition, this market is anticipated to expand at a CAGR of around 4.17% from 2025 to 2030.

Export-Import Outlook of the Chocolate Industry

The expanding chocolate market in Bangladesh has the potential to capitalise on the demand for reasonably priced, superior chocolate goods in nearby nations. There are chances to enter foreign markets, especially in South Asia, since our local chocolate market has been establishing a reputation for excellence and creativity. Bangladesh was the 83rd-largest chocolate exporter in the world in 2022, according to OEC data. Chocolate ranked 135th among Bangladesh's exported products. In contrast, chocolate was the 396th most imported product in Bangladesh that year, and Bangladesh was the 104th largest importer of chocolate worldwide.

Figure 4: Export-Import Data of Chocolate in Bangladesh (2021-2022)



Source: OEC

Growth Potentials of the Chocolate Market

The market for chocolate in Bangladesh is now burgeoning, and the growth of this industry is bolstered by several key factors:

Figure 5: Growth Drivers of Chocolate Market in Bangladesh



Source: Author's Design

Increasing Affluence

As our economy continues to thrive, the middle-class population has been growing significantly within the country. As a result, this economic transformation has led to greater purchasing power and increasing indulgence in a variety of chocolates from both local and international brands.

Growing Youth Demographic

Bangladesh has a huge younger consumer base, with more than 53.46% of the population under the age of 25. Younger people are more open to trying different kinds of chocolate. Social media's growth has also given influencers a platform to market these new products, thus increasing demand.

Changing Consumption Patterns

Chocolate consumption patterns have changed as a result of urban Bangladeshis' fast-paced lifestyle. Chocolate is becoming a popular product day by day as more individuals choose it for easy snacks or for rapid energy boosts. 72% of respondents believe chocolate is a part of a happy, balanced lifestyle, as per an NCA release.

Utility as Gifts

The chocolate market has grown largely as a result of the rising habit of giving chocolates as gifts at different business events, festivals, and special occasions. 72% of consumers said they occasionally give chocolate to people for special occasions, according to an NCA publication.

Health-consciousness

Demand for healthier chocolate options, such as dark chocolate, has surged due to the growing trend of health consciousness in food consumption.

Rising E-Commerce

Chocolate manufacturers in Bangladesh have a chance to capitalise on the developing online market due to the increasing use of e-commerce platforms. Over the upcoming years (2024–2028), the Bangladeshi Sweets & Chocolate eCommerce market is anticipated to grow at a CAGR of 28.5%, reaching a projected market size of US\$60.0 million.

Challenges and Way Ahead

Although Bangladesh's chocolate market has a lot of room to grow, there are still many obstacles in the way. The supply of raw ingredients, including sugar, cocoa, milk powder, various flavoured powders, essences, etc., is crucial to the chocolate industry. As Bangladesh is an import-dependent country for many of these ingredients, the country faces many challenges due to price volatility and currency depreciation. Additionally, the industry is now extremely competitive due to the introduction of numerous local and foreign brands. Because of this fierce competition, manufacturers must constantly innovate and provide value-added products to set themselves apart from rivals. Furthermore, customers' sensitivity to price, particularly in the lower and middle income groups, forces brands to balance affordability with quality. Bangladesh may also encounter difficulties with import taxes and restrictions as a result of the growing imports of chocolate from other countries. For many local chocolate manufacturers in Bangladesh, distribution and production infrastructure continue to be significant obstacles.

Due to shifting consumer preferences, growing retail networks, and the emergence of e-commerce, Bangladesh's chocolate market is going through a period of fast change. The market is expected to increase significantly as long as local and foreign competitors keep up their competition and innovation. To safeguard both local producers and

customers, our government must make sure the sector functions inside a regulated framework. With a youthful and increasingly affluent population, Bangladesh presents a promising opportunity for the chocolate industry, making it an exciting sector to watch in the coming years.



Bhumijo



Farhana Rashid

Co-Founder and CEO, Bhumijo

Interviewed By

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana, Team MBR

Co-founded by Ms. Farhana Rashid in 2017, Bhumijo, a social enterprise, offers sanitary, accessible, and reasonably priced smart toilets in low-income locations. Other amenities, including showers, clean drinking water, laundry, snacks, and advertising space, are also offered by Bhumijo by constructing new restrooms or renovating existing ones. Pay-per-use or subscription models are both available for all these services. Team MBR was in a conversation with the co-founder and CEO of Bhumijo, Ms. Rashid, and had the opportunity to find out more about her motivations behind forming the startup and her future aspirations surrounding Bhumijo.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Bhumijo started its journey in 2017, based upon the unique concept of offering smart toilet solutions in the low-income urban areas of Bangladesh. May we know about the story behind coming up with such an idea?

Farhana Rashid: Bhumijo started from a very personal place. I lost a loved one to a severe UTI, something that could have been easily prevented with access to clean public toilets. It was heartbreaking, but what struck me even more was realising how common this struggle

is—millions of women in our cities go through their day without drinking enough water, simply because they don't have access to safe, usable public toilets.

That thought stayed with me. I couldn't ignore the fact that something as basic as sanitation was forcing women to make unthinkable compromises with their health and dignity. That's when I knew I had to do something. Bhumijo was born from the belief that no one should have to suffer because they can't find a clean toilet. It started as an idea, a small step toward change,

and today, it's a movement to make cities more livable, inclusive, and safe for everyone.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Through a subscription or pay-per-use basis, Bhumijo offers hygienic and reasonably priced smart toilets in low-income communities along with a variety of additional services. Would you please share with us in brief about the business model implemented by Bhumijo?

Farhana Rashid: Bhumijo runs on a pay-per-use and subscription-based model, making our services affordable and accessible. Our toilets operate in markets, transport hubs, and busy urban areas, ensuring that the people who need them most—women, workers, day labourers, and travellers—have access to clean facilities. We also generate revenue through corporate partnerships, branding collaborations (like Unilever Bangladesh's Domex), and sanitation services such as Smart Toilet Rental and Smart Facility Management Services. This approach allows us to be financially sustainable while continuing to serve communities.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: With the expertise of a talented group of designers, architects, urban planners, and researchers, Bhumijo has been providing a variety of sanitation products and wash services in numerous areas. Would you please share with us about the solutions Bhumijo offers to improve hygiene?

Farhana Rashid: At Bhumijo, we believe that hygiene is more than just access to toilets. Our services include:

- Smart Public Toilets: Clean, hygienic, and safe technology-enabled restrooms.
- Smart Facility Management Services: Ensuring cleanliness in corporate and Govt offices, hospitals and educational institutions to maintain hassle-free facility management.

- Sanitation Planning & Design: Helping municipalities, city corporations, and NGOs design better wash facilities and prepare integrated sanitation plans for urban areas.
- Hygiene Awareness Programs: Engaging communities to promote better sanitation practices.

These solutions create sustainable, long-term improvements in urban hygiene.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Since constructing the first women-only toilet at Gausia Market, Dhaka, in 2017, Bhumijo has made significant progress in addressing sanitation issues. May we know a bit about your assessment of the success rate of Bhumijo in achieving its goals?

Farhana Rashid: Since our first project in 2017, Bhumijo has been committed to providing safe, clean, and accessible sanitation solutions, particularly for low-income communities. We design and operate smart public toilets, offer cleaning services, and provide rental toilets for events, ensuring that hygiene is not a privilege but a basic right.

One of our notable successes has been increasing the percentage of female users from just 3% to 20%, demonstrating the impact of safe and well-maintained facilities in encouraging more women to use public toilets. Over the years, we have expanded our services and have served over 4 million people, continuously improving urban sanitation standards.

Our goal is not just to build toilets but to create sustainable, well-managed sanitation solutions that cater to the needs of the people. By integrating smart technology, community engagement, and user-friendly designs, we are making urban sanitation more inclusive and effective.



Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Putting such initiatives into execution on a large scale must require a hefty amount of investment. May we know about your fundraising journey or if you have any such plans to fundraise in the future?

Farhana Rashid: Funding has been a mix of grants, competitions, equity, and partnerships. Winning the 2024 Waislitz Global Citizen Award was a major milestone, allowing us to scale up. We have also received support from programs like TRANSFORM by Unilever, BRAC, GSMA Innovation Fund, and Vitol Foundation, which have helped us expand our impact and develop innovative sanitation solutions.

Additionally, collaborations with corporate partners like Unilever Bangladesh ensure business sustainability. Moving forward, we are exploring investment opportunities, new grants, and strategic partnerships to further expand our reach, develop more smart sanitation solutions, and drive lasting change in urban hygiene. We plan to have 100 facilities by 2026 and 1000 facilities by 2030.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: When it comes to sanitation efforts, behavioural modification is frequently a major obstacle. Would you please share with us the challenges you have faced in changing people's attitudes towards hygiene and how you have tackled those challenges?

Farhana Rashid: Behavioural change is one of the toughest challenges in sanitation. Many people still avoid public toilets due to safety and hygiene concerns or cultural stigma. To tackle this, we:

- Design toilets that feel safe, clean, and welcoming.
- Run awareness through sign symbols to educate users.
- Incorporation of technology to make our operation user-friendly and maintain efficient management.

Through these efforts, we are slowly shifting mindsets and making clean toilets a necessity, not a luxury.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: It is crucial to increase knowledge among low-income individuals, particularly women, in order to lessen the negative effects of inadequate hygiene on general health. May we know if there are any such awareness-raising initiatives from Bhumijo?

Farhana Rashid: At Bhumijo, we understand the importance of raising awareness about sanitation, especially among low-income communities and women. Along with our World Toilet Day campaign, we continuously run awareness messages on social media and directly within our toilet facilities to educate users on the importance of hygiene and its direct impact on health. We also focus on policy advocacy, engaging with key stakeholders to influence decision-making processes and ensure that sanitation remains a priority at the policy level. Additionally, we are committed to service improvement activities, consistently gathering feedback from users and refining our solutions to meet their evolving needs. These efforts aim to create long-term behavioural changes and improve public health in the communities we serve.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Partnerships, whether with government entities, NGOs, or private organisations, can be vital for reaching broader communities. Would you please share with us any such partnership agreement or collaboration that has been key to your success in the sanitation sector?

Farhana Rashid: Partnerships play a crucial role in expanding our impact, and we have been fortunate to collaborate with a variety of organisations. Our key partners include municipalities and city corporations, who help us integrate sanitation solutions into urban development and ensure wider access to our services. In addition, we are supported by

Unilever Bangladesh Ltd., whose collaboration on branding our toilet facilities under the Domex brand promotes hygiene and sustainability.

We also work with NGOs, private organisations, and government entities, whose support has been instrumental in scaling our initiatives and reaching underserved communities. These partnerships have helped us deliver hygienic, inclusive sanitation solutions that contribute to improved public health.

Sumaiya Tarannum Sujana: Your shift from an architectural background to entrepreneurship is truly inspiring. What recommendations would you want to

give to those who want to choose an entrepreneurial journey and make an impact through their work?

Farhana Rashid: Entrepreneurship is a journey of resilience and purpose. If you're passionate about solving a real problem, my advice is:

- Be persistent—challenges will come, but so will opportunities.
- Start with impact in mind—money will follow.
- Leverage partnerships—collaboration accelerates growth.



CAPITAL MARKET REVIEW

Performance of Equity Markets of Bangladesh and Peer Countries

Table 1: Equity market performance of Bangladesh and peer countries

Indices	Index Points, January 2025	Return*					
		1M	3M	YTD	12M	3Y	5Y
Bangladesh							
DSEX	5,112.9	-1.8%	-1.7%	-1.8%	-16.9%	-26.2%	14.4%
DS30	1,903.8	-1.4%	-1.2%	-1.4%	-9.5%	-25.6%	24.9%
DSES	1,134.0	-2.8%	-1.0%	-2.8%	-16.1%	-23.5%	10.3%
Peer Countries							
Pakistan (KSE100)	114,255.7	-0.8%	40.9%	-0.8%	84.3%	151.8%	174.4%
Sri Lanka (CSE - All Share)	17,010.0	8.0%	56.3%	8.0%	65.0%	30.8%	186.9%
Vietnam (VNI)	1,265.1	-0.1%	2.6%	-0.1%	8.7%	-14.5%	35.1%
MSCI Frontier Markets Index	844.7	2.5%	3.5%	2.5%	10.3%	-1.8%	9.9%

*All returns are Holding Period Return

Source: Investing.com, MSCI, DSE

Liquidity Condition in Equity Market of Bangladesh

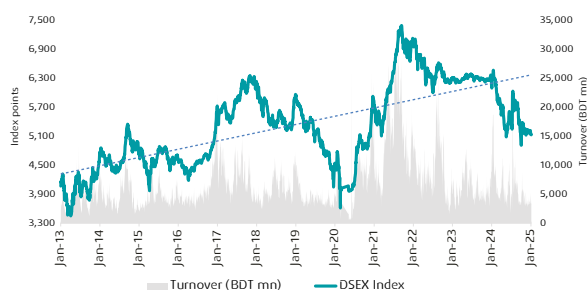
Table 2: Market capitalization and turnover statistics

Particulars	31-Jan-25	31-Dec-24	%change
Total market capitalization (BDT mn)	6,648,251	6,626,198	0.3%
Total equity market capitalization (BDT mn)	3,495,456	3,556,316	-1.7%
Total free float market capitalization (BDT mn)	1,444,388	1,446,560	-0.2%
Daily Avg. Turnover (BDT mn)	3,601	3,624	-0.6%
Turnover Velocity~	14.3%	13.1%	N/A

~Turnover velocity is calculated by dividing monthly total turnover with month-end market capitalization. The figures are annualized.

Historical Index Points and Market Participation Data

Figure 1: DSEX since inception along with market turnover

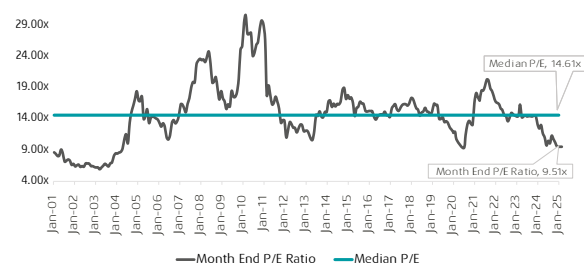


Source: DSE

Market Valuation Level - P/E Ratio

Figure 2: Historical market P/E* and it's median

Current Market P/E in Context of History



*Price Earnings (P/E) Ratio is calculated by dividing total market capitalization of all profit making listed companies with their total audited annual earnings.

Source: CEIC, DSE

Sector Performance

Table 3: Sector performance snapshot

Sector	Market Capitalization (BDT mn)		Return*						P/E** (x)	P/BV^ (x)	Dividend Yield~
	Total	Free Float	1M	3M	YTD	12M	3Y	5Y			
Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	540,596	265,863	-3.8%	-0.4%	-3.8%	-20.6%	-21.0%	30.7%	10.8	2.4	3.2%
Bank	707,854	431,587	-0.8%	-3.9%	-0.8%	4.1%	-1.7%	47.5%	6.7	0.7	4.9%
Telecommunication	621,997	64,857	3.3%	6.1%	3.3%	21.5%	3.5%	76.0%	13.3	6.5	3.7%
Engineering	279,845	115,035	-1.0%	-2.3%	-1.0%	-29.7%	-44.9%	14.0%	16.8	1.3	5.2%
Fuel & Power	284,210	82,365	-1.4%	2.6%	-1.4%	-15.5%	-30.3%	-9.5%	5.1	0.9	5.2%
Food & Allied	303,977	96,230	-3.4%	-2.9%	-3.4%	-21.6%	-29.8%	29.1%	13.7	6.9	0.4%
Miscellaneous	247,750	108,336	1.3%	2.7%	1.3%	-3.8%	-6.0%	139.5%	17.6	2.7	1.2%
NBFI	101,282	31,876	-10.7%	-16.4%	-10.7%	-26.4%	-54.7%	-25.6%	506.1	1.1	2.0%
Textile	117,443	65,552	2.0%	7.3%	2.0%	-10.4%	-28.3%	11.0%	12.3	0.8	2.9%
Cement	86,428	34,281	-7.1%	-9.8%	-7.1%	-25.4%	-25.7%	17.6%	12.9	2.3	3.4%
Non-Life Insurance	76,445	42,072	-4.8%	-1.3%	-4.8%	-27.5%	-40.6%	51.7%	13.1	1.5	3.7%
Life Insurance	45,341	25,934	-7.2%	-7.7%	-7.2%	-28.6%	-45.1%	-26.6%	31.7	4.5	3.1%
Tannery	22,212	10,531	-3.0%	-0.7%	-3.0%	-23.7%	-37.9%	11.2%	35.5	2.0	2.5%
IT	26,149	16,080	0.2%	-4.4%	0.2%	-30.8%	-8.3%	29.5%	18.1	2.1	1.9%
Ceramics	16,301	6,867	0.2%	3.4%	0.2%	-34.2%	-54.5%	-20.7%	(42.8)	1.1	3.0%
Travel & Leisure	36,654	15,017	-3.2%	-8.9%	-3.2%	-41.4%	-26.6%	-12.1%	582.3	0.7	1.5%
Paper & Printing	18,246	8,055	3.6%	4.9%	3.6%	-59.4%	-62.3%	-16.1%	41.4	1.3	1.2%
Services & Real Estate	17,427	8,703	1.5%	10.1%	1.5%	-25.0%	-25.8%	42.1%	10.4	1.0	3.3%
Jute	21,956	15,147	-11.9%	-24.5%	-11.9%	-55.6%	-15.4%	-21.4%	60.9	64.9	0.5%
Market	3,495,456	1,444,388	-1.8%	-1.7%	-1.8%	-16.9%	-26.2%	14.4%	9.5	1.4	3.5%

*All returns are Holding Period Return.

**Price Earnings (P/E) Ratio is calculated by dividing total market capitalization of all profit making listed companies with their annualized earnings.

^P/BV is calculated by dividing total market capitalization of listed companies with their respective total book values, excluding companies with negative book values.

~Dividend yield is calculated by dividing last year's declared cash dividend with market capitalization

Cap Class Performance

Table 4: Performance of different market cap classes

Cap Class	Definition based on market capitalization (BDT mn)	% of total equity MCap	Return*						P/E (x)	P/BV (x)	Dividend Yield
				3M	YTD	12M	3Y	5Y			
Large	≥10000	80.0%	-0.9%	-0.1%	-0.9%	-4.5%	-14.7%	68.5%	9.1	1.4	4.1%
Mid	3001-9999	9.5%	-2.8%	-1.9%	-2.8%	-26.1%	-40.7%	-50.0%	13.7	1.0	3.5%
Small	1001-3000	6.9%	-2.3%	2.3%	-2.3%	-29.0%	-35.8%	39.0%	17.9	0.7	2.8%
Micro	<1000	3.6%	2.6%	3.1%	2.6%	-32.2%	-21.0%	-83.3%	41.2	0.9	1.3%
Market		100.0%	-1.8%	-1.7%	-1.8%	-16.9%	-26.2%	14.4%	9.5	1.4	3.5%

*All returns are Holding Period Return

Mutual Funds Performance

Table 5: Selected open-end funds based on fund type

Fund Category	Name	Asset Management Company	Fund Size (BDT mn) [^]	NAV Return		
				2024	2023	2021-23 ^{**}
Fixed Income	EDGE High Quality Income Fund	Edge	654.9	9.1%	4.8%	5.2%
Fixed Income	IDLC Income Fund	IDLC	704.3	8.8%	6.5%	7.2%
Fixed Income	Shanta Fixed Income Fund	Shanta	947.8	9.5%	3.7%	2.7%
Fixed Income	UCB Income Plus Fund	UCB	1,873.9	10.2%	3.5%	N/A
Equity	Grameen Bank-Aims First Unit Fund	AIMS	1,479.6	4.8%	7.6%	N/A
Equity	IDLC Growth Fund	IDLC	766.8	1.6%	3.3%	6.0%
Equity	LankaBangla 1st Balanced Unit Fund	LankaBangla	412.4	-3.4%	2.6%	6.4%
Equity	Shanta First Income Unit Fund	Shanta	706.4	-20.0%	1.4%	9.1%
Equity	VIPB SEBL 1st Unit Fund	VIPB	930.5	4.0%	2.8%	N/A
Equity	VIPB NLI 1st Unit Fund	VIPB	593.3	3.7%	1.9%	N/A
Shariah	EDGE Al-Amin Shariah Consumer Fund	Edge	140.6	1.2%	1.2%	N/A
Shariah	IDLC AM Shariah Fund	IDLC	617.4	-3.7%	2.7%	0.5%
Shariah	Shanta Amanah Shariah Fund	Shanta	464.5	-16.1%	4.0%	6.1%
Shariah	UCB Taqwa Growth Fund	UCB	366.1	2.6%	2.7%	N/A
Market (Broad Index) Return (%)				-16.7%	0.6%	5.0%

[^]Fund size as of September 2024

^{*}NAV as on December 26, 2024 and index value as on December 30, 2024.

^{**}CAGR computed for 2021-2023, adjusted for dividend. YTD returns of funds debuting within the year represent return generated since debut, hence is not directly comparable with return of funds that operated throughout the year.

Table 6: Top ten close end funds based on 3Y return (CAGR) performance

DSE Code	Fund Size (BDT mn)	Fund Size (USD mn)	Price ¹ (BDT)	NAV ¹ (BDT)	Price/ NAV	Dividend Yield ² (%)	NAV Return ³			Redemption Year ⁴
							2024	2023	2021-23	
ICBEPMF1S1	558.8	558.8	5.1	7.5	68.5%	0.0%	-20.6%	4.5%	13.3%	2030
1STPRIMFMF	173.4	173.4	30.8	8.7	355.2%	3.2%	-28.9%	3.7%	13.0%	2029
PF1STMF	435.6	435.6	5.5	7.3	75.8%	0.0%	-23.8%	6.7%	12.6%	2030
ICBAMCL2ND	408.5	408.5	6.1	8.2	74.7%	0.0%	-19.8%	4.4%	12.1%	2029
ICB3RDNRB	747.0	747.0	4.6	7.5	61.6%	0.0%	-17.4%	4.2%	12.0%	2030
PRIME1ICBA	783.0	783.0	4.7	7.8	60.0%	0.0%	-18.9%	3.0%	11.0%	2030
ICBSONALI1	837.0	837.0	6.5	8.4	77.7%	0.0%	-17.3%	5.2%	9.6%	2033
IFILISLMF1	702.0	702.0	4.7	7.0	67.0%	0.0%	-25.0%	4.7%	9.4%	2030
CAPMBDBLMF	431.1	431.1	5.7	8.6	66.3%	0.0%	-21.7%	-4.1%	9.2%	2027
ICBAGRANI1	891.2	891.2	7.2	9.1	79.3%	0.0%	-13.3%	4.7%	9.2%	2027
Market							-16.7%	0.6%	5.0%	

¹Price as on December 26, 2024 and index value as on December 30, 2024.

²Cash dividend declared on 2024.

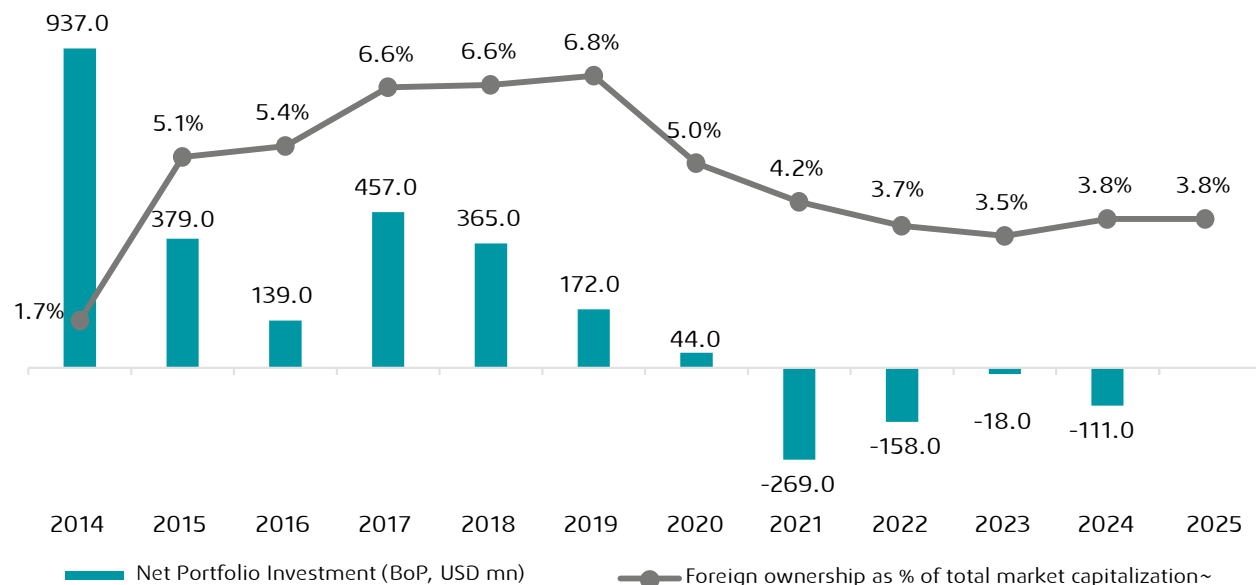
³CAGR computed for 2021-2023, adjusted for dividend. YTD returns of funds debuting within the year represent return generated since debut, hence is not directly comparable with return of funds that operated throughout the year.

⁴In reference to BSEC Press Release বিএসইসি/মুখপত্র (৩য় খণ্ড)/১০১১/১৫ published on Sep 16, 2018, tenure of existing listed closed end mutual funds can be extended by another tenure equal to maximum 10 years, provided that the full tenure of the subject fund does not exceed 20 years in total. However, the mutual funds those are not willing to extend their tenure will still have the option to convert or wind up as per rules and regulations.

Foreign Participation in Equity Market of Bangladesh

In January 2025, Bangladesh's equity market witnessed a slight increase in foreign investment. As of January 2025, total foreign ownership stood at 3.8% of the total equity market capitalization, which was only 1.7% in February 2014.

Figure 3: : Net foreign portfolio investment and foreign ownership as % of total equity market capitalization



Source: DSE and Bangladesh Bank

Note:

1. % of foreign ownership of equity market capitalization as of November 2024 and net portfolio investment as of June of the respective years.
2. Net portfolio investment of FY'24 includes Jul-Oct, 2024.

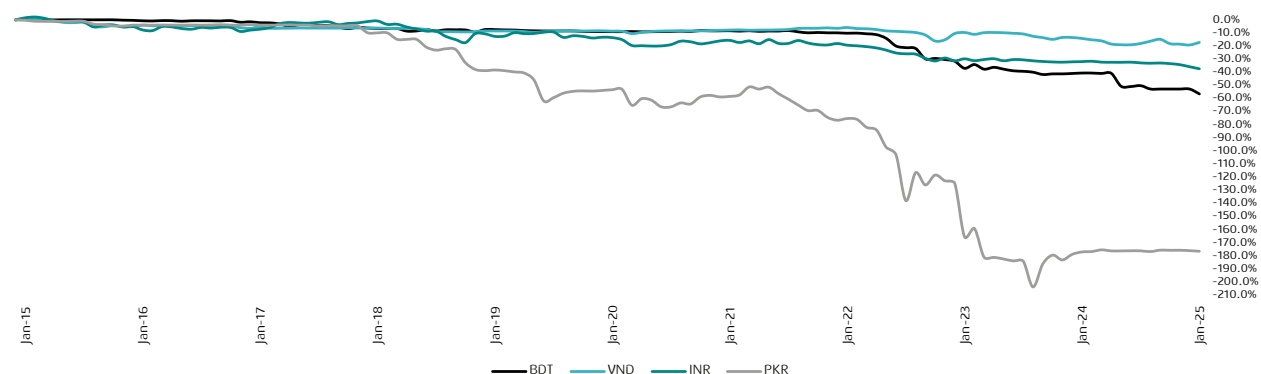
Table 7: Top ten companies with highest foreign shareholding as of January 2025

Ticker	Sector	Foreign Shareholding*
OLYMPIC	Food & Allied	34.3%
BRACBANK	Bank	32.1%
BXPHERMA	Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	27.1%
RENATA	Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	21.0%
NAVANAPHAR	Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	19.6%
ISLAMIBANK	Bank	17.9%
BSRMLTD	Engineering	17.1%
SQURPHARMA	Pharmaceuticals & Chemicals	15.5%
UTTARAFIN	NBFI	7.8%
SHEPHERD	Textile	7.1%

Source: DSE

Performance of BDT and Currencies of Peer Countries against USD

Figure 4: Nine year's relative performance of BDT and peer currencies



Source: Investing.com

Major Commodity Price Movement

Table 8: Major Commodity Price Movement

Particulars	Price Change					
	1M	3M	YTD	12M	3Y	5Y
Crude oil (Average)	8.1%	5.7%	8.1%	0.6%	-6.9%	26.8%
Wheat (US HRW)	0.8%	-6.9%	0.8%	-10.5%	-32.1%	13.2%
Cotton (A Index)	-2.2%	-6.5%	-2.2%	-15.1%	-40.8%	-1.1%
Aluminum	1.3%	-0.9%	1.3%	17.4%	-14.4%	45.1%

Source: World Bank Pink Sheet

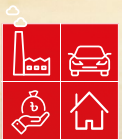
*Average of Crude oil (Brent), Crude oil (Dubai), Crude oil (WTI)




কাঙ্ক্ষিত লক্ষ্যে পৌঁছাতে দরকার হয় একটু নির্ভরতার!

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